



INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

AN ASSESSMENT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN CHULA VISTA

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Assessment of Civic Engagement in Chula Vista:

Findings and Recommendations

I. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Institute for Local Government, a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization, was asked to carry out a civic engagement assessment for the City of Chula Vista and to offer recommendations for the improvement of the practices associated with the involvement of residents in public decision and policy making in that city. This assessment was conducted by Terry Amsler, Program Director of the Institute's Collaborative Governance Initiative. While information concerning the condition and nature of civic engagement was drawn from a wide-ranging series of interviews with numerous members of neighborhood, civic, faith, business and public sectors, Terry Amsler is solely responsible for this Report's content.

Underlying this assessment is the belief that effective local governance requires increased attention to bottom-up approaches to decision making and that a wider range of participants are legitimate members of such public decision making processes. Increasingly, civic engagement strategies are employed by municipalities for the following purposes:

- To discover and understand the public's preferences
- To improve decisions by incorporating residents' knowledge
- To enhance transparency and trust in government
- To create a more collaborative civic and political culture that supports the public interest and effective governance

This author very respectfully offers this Report to public officials, civic, cultural and business groups and other individuals and organizations in Chula Vista interested in effective public involvement and good governance. Hopefully the contents of this Report may serve as a useful starting point for discussions about how to continue to advance civic engagement efforts. It is the author's experience that the best civic engagement practices emerge from the commitment of all groups in a community to make public involvement a collective agenda item, to identify

common goals (for civic engagement), to try new approaches, and to jointly assess and learn from these efforts.

The author wishes to acknowledge the generosity with which his visits have been received and the frankness and openness of those responding to his questions. While there are many perspectives on the city's history and the scope and approaches to civic engagement, Chula Vista is clearly poised to make continued advances in this area. The Institute for Local Government is pleased to be a part of that effort.

Finally, we consider it something of an ethical responsibility to acknowledge that consultants can make recommendations with little thought about their potential costs or budget impacts. Public officials do not have this luxury.

II. CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The intent here is *not* simply the presentation of a detached "expert" report that presumes too much and offers little direction to move from recommendations to action. While offered with an appreciation of an outsider's always limited perspective, this Report intends to provide practical observations and ideas that build on the interests, commitments and ideas of people in all sectors of the city, to acknowledge present efforts underway, and to suggest ways to build on those efforts.

In addition to introductory and methodology sections, this Report includes findings and recommendations relating to civic engagement across city commissions, city departments and the community. A section on inclusion and access is also included. An Appendix includes survey questionnaires and materials relevant to the subject of the report.

While the work of Chula Vista's commissions is certainly a part of the City's overall civic engagement function, commissions have their own section in this Report in order to bring clarity and focus to the relevant findings and recommendations.

Findings are grouped separately for the respective “City Departments and Civic Engagement” and Community Perceptions of Civic Engagement” sections, again for clarity and focus. However, *recommendations* for these areas are listed together in the “City and Community: Recommendations” section as the recommendations for these sectors are often closely intertwined in intention and content.

While findings and recommendations for “Inclusion and Access” issues could also be spread throughout this Report, they are both grouped together in their own section for clarity and focus.

Recommendations are all in italics and are numbered in a series across sections VI, IX, and X.

III. ASSUMPTIONS AND CAVEATS

The interest of the Chula Vista City Council to secure this assessment and articulate principles of public participation, in conjunction with the commitment of city staff across a number of departments to develop new approaches that seek the public’s input and guidance, are important steps in building effective civic engagement practices. Of equal importance, voices from community, business, civic, faith-based and other settings add critical experience, information, views and values that inform public decision-making. Organizations from these latter sectors are also important educators and communicators - of their members and others in the community - about public issues and participation opportunities. Together, public, private and civic sectors serve as important components of an effective civic engagement infrastructure.

There is no single path or “science” that presents an easy roadmap for constructing the habits, protocols and mechanisms that make up a good culture of civic engagement. This is especially true as nearly all cities experience contention over their desired nature and future. Chula Vista, given its location, pace of change, and the significant issues that exist in planning for growth and development, will particularly benefit from effective community engagement practices; and will also find it a challenge to develop them. This must be shared work with its own agenda, and a willingness on the part of all to hear criticism, learn together, and adapt approaches as practice and learning dictate.

Good public involvement does not remove controversy and conflict, nor does it suggest that extensive public involvement is required for all matters. These participatory approaches can, however, provide the best practices and forums for handling appropriate matters constructively and honestly, and with the full exploration of common interests. This assessment seeks to offer guidance to the development of a more collaborative community able to confront the challenges ahead.

It is worth noting that while this Report's recommendations are made in service to successful and inclusive public engagement, they are offered not as the final word on the subject but as an agenda to be amended and determined by Chula Vistans and their government as part the their planning and implementation of more effective and collaborative governance. This is the only way these recommendations will be useful.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology or framework of this assessment can be characterized as a qualitative needs assessment, using a "snowball sampling" approach that allows the researcher to build a network of information sources as they become identified from the previously contacted individuals. This helps to prevent a certain type of bias if working from only an initial and single list of contacts.

To gather information for this assessment, more than fifty interviews and surveys were conducted some with multiple participants. These involved City staff and commission chairs, along with leadership and members of civic, community, political, business and religious groups. Most were oral interviews conducted in person or by phone, with written surveys distributed to city commission chairs and selected city departments. Terry Amsler made a half dozen visits to Chula Vista to meet with a public, private and civic sector representatives, and held two public meetings to provide members of the public with the opportunity to learn about the assessment and offer input.

Among the specific components of this assessment were the following:

- Written surveys distributed and returned from a range of city commissions.

- A wide range of staff interviews including, but not limited to, the City Attorney's Office, Planning and Building Department, Engineering Department, Police Department, Public Works, and the City Clerk's Office, Community Development Department, Public Works, and the Director of Communication. Some of these oral interviews were followed by more in-depth written survey responses.
- Attendance at meetings of a number of local community and political organizations, and discussions with individuals in leadership positions as well as with other members in a number of instances. These organizations included Crossroads II, Northwest Civics, Southwest Civics and the South Bay Forum.
- In-person discussions and phone interviews were also conducted with representatives of mobile home communities, the Environmental Health Coalition, Healthy Eating Active Communities, and other groups.
- Interviews with Chamber, business, service and faith leaders were also held.
- Informal discussions with the previous and present mayor and, individually, with a number of Council members.
- To ensure a better understanding of issues of Hispanic public involvement, the Institute has used its own resources to commission the holding of two local focus groups to assess and opportunities and barriers to effective participation by this significant segment of Chula Vista's resident population.¹
- Attendance at meetings of the Chula Vista Redevelopment Corporation Board, the Redevelopment Advisory Committee, the Design Review Commission, and others.

¹ As this was not envisioned initially as a part of this assessment, and was not a part of the City's contract with Institute, the Institute had to raise additional funds and this postponed the focus groups. Results are therefore not yet available but will be added as a Report Appendix once received.

The content of the report focuses on a certain type of civic engagement, namely the involvement of residents, whether organized or as individuals, in planning and other public decisions and policymaking. This report at times may refer to this topic as civic engagement, public involvement, public participation or collaborative governance. For purposes of focus, we exclude from consideration those types of civic engagement in which residents volunteer to staff city hall information booths, help build a neighborhood playground or participate in other service-related roles.

Finally, while we are concerned with a more direct role for residents in the political life of their community, we are not addressing matters of direct democracy (for example, ballot initiatives), but rather how public participation can inform and shape the work and decision making of local officials.

Work on the assessment was held in abeyance for a period of time during the summer of 2006 at the City's request, and the consultant's health issues in late 2006 and early 2007 somewhat delayed work on the assessment.

V. CHULA VISTA: THE SETTING

Chula Vista is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States and San Diego County's second largest municipality. Resident population increased more than 25% between 2000 and 2005 and commercial and industrial growth increased at nearly the same pace. The 2005 population stood at 217,543: with 49% Hispanic; 31% White; 13% Asian; and 6% African-American. By 2030, total population is expected to reach 223,500; the number of homes may increase by 47% and total employment is anticipated to reach 79,442, a 48% increase from the year 2000. The total land area of 33,024 acres is diverse from coastal shoreline in the west to the San Miguel Mountains in the east.²

This has been, and continues to be, a rapidly growing and developing community. Initially incorporated in 1911, much of the City's historic growth traces back to World War II and the post WW II boom, as well as to Chula Vista's regional and waterfront location between the

² From Chula Vista Community Development Department, *City Profile & Demographic Trends*.

Mexican border and downtown San Diego. Expansion and development to the east resulted during and immediately after the war. In 1985, residents of the unincorporated Montgomery area voted to become part of Chula Vista, adding approximately 23,000 new residents. During the late 1980s and 1990s, Rancho del Ray, Eastlake and other master planned communities began to develop.³

Otay Ranch was annexed to the City in 1997. The Otay Ranch Parcel is 14 square miles and is planned for 18,000 residential units with 660 acres designated for the University and 256 acres of Industrial lands. Planning Area 12 of the Otay Ranch Parcel designates 130 acres for regional commercial and 82 acres for office uses, as well as mixed use development including over 6 million square feet of multi-family residential, regional office and retail, visitor commercial and cultural uses.⁴

The Bay front is also primed for a major \$200 million dollar development, with expectations for hotels, convention center, restaurants, housing units, a marina redesign, a 30 acre signature park and more.

None of this will be news to Chula Vistans. However from the perspective of developing effective methods of public engagement, this rapid pace of change adds enormous content for public engagement process attention, puts increasing demands on community and business groups to become informed and to add their voices to relevant decision making, presses local officials with an expanding agenda of seeking public support, and adds to an environment that will lead to conclusions by some residents that their city is changing - and not necessarily for the better – and that this change is “out of control.”⁵

Such a setting offers little breathing room for civic and business groups, government and others to reflect on the larger civic engagement picture, to assess what’s been tried, to come to better

³ From the Chula Vista Community Development Department, *City of Chula Vista Housing Element, a component of the Chula Vista General Plan, 2006*; and staff comments.

⁴ From the Daily Transcript, South County Expansion Supplement, *Development continues at hot pace in county’s South Bay area*, October 5, 2006.

⁵ This phrase was used a number of times by individuals spoken with by this Report’s author.

trust one another's intentions, and to develop, in effect, a jointly determined agenda for developing civic engagement capacity.

VI. CITY COMMISSIONS: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

City commissions are included as a subject of this assessment in recognition of their important role in city government. Significant civic contributions are made by residents who volunteer their time and sit as commission members, and these bodies serve as important vehicles for community input. City commissions also serve as a skilled and sophisticated talent pool for local government.

The City Charter, Article VI Section 600, establishes four appointed commissions and boards: 1) Planning Commission, 2) Board of Library Trustees, 3) Civil Service Commission, and 4) Parks and Recreation Commission. Additionally, the City Council has created nineteen additional commissions, committees and boards, summarized in the Municipal Code in Title 2 http://www.codepublishing.com/ca/chulavista_html.html. All appointed groups, established by Charter or by the Council, are described on the City website at: http://www.chulavistaca.gov/City_Services/Administrative_Services/City_Clerk/Boards/default.asp.

Volunteer appointed commissions, committees and boards play a central role in the government decision-making process. They serve a variety of specific functions and act as advisory bodies to the main governing body, the City Council. The appointed bodies balance staff professional analysis with community input and values. In the case of some appointed commissions, particularly land use bodies, they act as decision makers on certain quasi-judicial matters and non-political advisors on legislative matters. In the case of the Planning Commission, this role is also constituted in State statutes.

The Chairs of eight city commissions returned the questionnaire distributed to all city commissions. Responses were received by the following commissions:

Board of Appeals and Advisors

Board of Ethics

International Friendship Commission
Mobile Home Rent Review Commission
Nature Center Board of Trustees
Resource Conservation Commission
Safety Commissions
Veterans Advisory Commission

The complete questionnaire, containing more than 30 questions, is appended to this report

Purpose and Relationships: Findings

Overall, those responding to the survey believe that commissioners' voices are heard in city government, and that their work is respected by the Council and the community. Comments on city staff who work with the commissions were also very positive for the most part. Most commissions appear to be clear on their general responsibilities, have sufficient and qualified members, and perceive that they are carrying out their respective work in good fashion. A small minority of respondents report some failure in receiving timely responses from the Council and/or city offices regarding questions or legal interpretation.

The perception by some community members (unaffiliated with any commission) that some commission staff were inappropriately directive to commission business did not show up as an issue in the responses of commission chairs.

There was some matter-of-fact mention of the Redevelopment Agency's action to assume the powers of the Planning Commission, Resource Conservation Commission and Design Review Committee in certain circumstances/areas, the opportunities for these three groups' input, and the action to develop the current RAC process.

There was less than unanimity on the issues of planning, goal setting and assessment. Responses were quite varied in terms of whether commissions engaged in any sort of annual goal setting or assessing their work on a regular basis. Some respondents felt it would be timely to revisit goals (and in a few cases, to consider adjustments to mission), and in some cases to create an annual

work plan where none now exists. In some cases there may be a brief summary provided to the Mayor and Council but this may not represent the true scope and value of the work. One respondent noted that, “problems do sometimes occur when members (commissioners) focus on their areas of expertise and do not see the ‘big picture’ that the overall commission should be addressing.”

A number of commissions suggested that more work could be done to assess the work of their respective commissions. Others felt that this was being done, or was not necessary.

Again, it should be remembered that commissions differ quite dramatically in their scope of work, and the requirements for goal setting and longer term planning will differ significantly among them.

Purpose and Relationships: Recommendations

1. *The Council should suggest a general requirement and template for each city commission to annually create a plan or work agenda (appropriate to the committee’s purpose) and assess its previous year’s work (content and process). These should be reviewed annually by the Council as well.*
2. *A commission’s self-assessment of its charge and work would usefully ask for the feedback and ideas of users and parties with particular interest in the commission’s area of responsibility.*
3. *The Council could make use of such plans and assessments to consider – at some appropriate intervals and with commission input – each commission’s purpose, the need for changes (if any) to these purposes, the overall effectiveness and appropriateness of each commission, and the city’s support for commissions and commissioners (see below).*

Recruitment and Membership: Findings

As stated above, commission respondents were generally satisfied with their commission's membership, and most but not all felt that members brought the required set of skills and capacities.

While there was a general understanding of how new commissioners were identified and selected – and the role of the Mayor and Council in candidate interview and ratification process – respondents were not always clear about whether there were specific criteria – written or otherwise – for respective commission membership, and at least some were unclear on the recruitment methods used to fill commission slots. There also seemed to be some limited confusion about the role of the Mayor and Council, respectively, in the process.

While it was not entirely clear from the questionnaires, some commission chairs appeared to have different understandings of the appropriate role of individual commissions in identifying or encouraging applications by specific individuals for their commission membership. There was also some uncertainty about the new commissioner applicant lists, including the nature of communication with applicants and whether commissioners had access to those lists.

Recruitment and Membership: Recommendations

4. *If not presently available and shared with city commissions, information on commission membership criteria, recruitment and selection should be so distributed (again taking into account the distinctions among different commissions). This should be a part of all new commissioner orientations (see below).*
5. *The responsibilities of the individual commissions in identifying membership needs, criteria and/or gaps in commission expertise, and the appropriate means to use this information in notices soliciting commission membership should be clarified and shared among commissions.*
6. *It may also be useful to access how interested residents who have applied for commission membership are kept informed about their candidacy.*

7. *While not a response to a comment in any specific returned questionnaire, it is recommended that the noticing of commission membership opportunities should ensure appropriate information sharing with media and organizations reaching the diverse communities reflected in Chula Vista's population, (Please also see the section on Inclusion and Access.)*

Orientation, Training, and Leadership Development: Findings

Respondents gave quite differing views on the regularity and form of the orientation of new commission members. In some cases this appears to be a staff function, and some respondents mention the presentation of a handbook to new members that describes their functions. A number of respondents suggested that commission members themselves deliver an orientation for new members, some quite elaborate; while others state the approach is primarily one of on-the-job training with no formal orientation. This can probably be at least partially explained by the different work culture and history of each of the several commissions.

Responding commission chairs also give different views on the opportunities for ongoing education and training of commission members. Some respondents suggest that there are few if any such opportunities – and no clear budget - for commission members. Others recount the opportunities for technical briefing for members; relevant docent training classes; and other training relating to a commission's responsibilities.

Orientation, Training and Leadership Development: Recommendations

8. *It would be helpful to have the Council state its expectations relating to new commissioner orientation, as well as to the roles of the Council, staff and/or commission chairs in these orientations. This is not to suggest inflexible or lockstep approaches however.*

9. *Given the importance of commissioners in the civic and political life of the community, the city should consider an appropriate budget item to support for reasonable training and professional development of commissioners in line with their needs and responsibilities – if this is not already in place. Such opportunities could be tied to years of commissioner service, commission plans, and/or specific commission needs.*

Meeting Notice and Format: Findings

While there are differences due to each respective commission's purpose and work, most report straight forward meeting formats, including agenda review, approval of minutes, public input, staff reports as appropriate, consideration and discussion of business items, member reports, etc. There is typically notice of the meetings posted on the City's website, city bulletin boards, and in the case of some commissions through notices in the community or specific sites that are central to the commission's responsibilities.

Respondents report that agendas are typically set either by chairs, chairs and commission members, or by city staff. Some respondents report that meetings follow Robert's Rules of Order.

Overall, meetings appear to be well run and the Chairs exercise appropriate leadership and facilitation. There seem to be standard meeting practices for most commissions, and little actual variation for the most part; with minor changes resulting, at times, from unusual levels of public participation. Even in these cases, there is typically a standard form of public input with a set time limit for each speaker.

Noticing of meetings appears different for different commissions (incomplete information was collected). Generally, notices are posted on the City's Agenda Board and on the City's website. Persons who have specifically requested notification of meetings are mailed meeting notices on a regular basis, and commissions with special relationships with specific groups and organizations tend to keep them informed. For instance, the Mobilehome Rent Review Commission mails its agendas to mobilehome park owners and notices are posted at mobilehome parks.

Meeting Notice and Format: Recommendations

10. *Commissions appear to exercise their functions with due care and commitment. As a means of ongoing learning and development, one recommendation is to bring commission chairs together once a year for a joint orientation and information-sharing*

session. This would be an opportunity to identify emerging commission needs, to gain information about any changes in relevant city protocols or policy, share experiences about effective commission practices, and/or receive useful training. A part of this meeting might usefully include a joint session with the City Council for purposes of common learning and relationship building.

11. *To support commission chairs in their important respective roles, training could be offered in meeting facilitation, relevant legal issues, or optional methods of securing public input.*

12. *Commissions, and the appropriate commission staff, should be requested to review their noticing process annually and identify particular organizations or groups that would benefit by regularly receiving information about commission agendas and business.*

13. *Appropriate media outlets reaching Spanish-speaking or other members of typically less involved communities might be better integrated into the notice process.*

14. *As is the case with a number of city commissions presently, other appropriate commissions may also consider reasonable “rotation” of sites for of their meetings to bring their work closer to interested members of the public.*

VII. CITY DEPARTMENTS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: FINDINGS

In a number of Chula Vista city departments, efforts have been made - and are continuing - to secure community and other stakeholder input. This takes many forms, and a few are offered here by way of illustration and a means to discuss a continuum of public involvement options for Chula Vista.

Improving Services

The Chula Vista Police Department supports the establishment of neighborhood watch programs intended to give residents a grater role in the safety of their community. Police representatives

attend community meetings and solicit input on the policing needs as well as on the actions of officers. Citizen academies are offered through the Community Relations Unit. Additionally, the Chief's Advisory Board meets monthly and of course the Public Safety Commission is another avenue for deliberation and community input.

Community Problem Solving

The Engineering Department has experimented with a promising approach to traffic-related issues that may involve signs, parking, traffic routing, speed bumps and the like. Initiated by the Department, perhaps due to expressions of community concern, the Engineering Department can solicit participation for a local working committee (from and for the affected area) through mailing to the appropriate area households. A committee of the interested is formed; relevant information (and meeting preparation and facilitation) is provided by Engineering Department staff; and this committee develops recommendations relevant to the traffic issue at hand. The final ideas are put to a mailed vote by residents in the designated neighborhood area (again with Engineering Dept. support). If approved, the ideas are then put into place for 60 days on a trial basis, allowing all parties to assess their utility and effectiveness. While apparently achieving its goals, budget constraints have recently resulted in cutbacks to this innovative effort.

Making Urban Plans

Housing Element of the General Plan

The Housing Division of the Planning and Building Department pursued a range of community involvement strategies in developing the 2006 Draft Housing Element of the Chula Vista General Plan. California requires diligent efforts to involve all economic segments of the population in the development of a Housing Element. In this case, the City employed focus and stakeholder groups, community workshops, and workshops associated with commission and Council meetings to solicit community engagement.

Housing staff particularly identified the stakeholder groups used as a part of this process as a successful element of the engagement effort. These groups, composed of about twenty invited

members representing a fairly balanced representation of significant community business, developer and other organizations, each met three times in respectful open dialogue to offer input into the major topic areas of the Housing Element Plan Update. The process section of the final Plan Update reports that responses from community input overall guided the Needs Assessment portions of the Housing Element as well as the Housing Policy and Implementation Plan.

The General Plan Update

The process for the City's General Plan Update also sought multiple methods of public involvement. Initially a consulting firm was employed to prepare staff and civic volunteers as facilitators to go into communities, schools and faith-based organizations to solicit input on the visions for Chula Vista to guide the public involvement process. Focus group sessions and Town Hall meetings were also held to gather input from the public concerning the kind of city residents wanted to see in 2030. A hotline and email address was also put in place where community members could offer input into the plan update process. The Planning and Building Department reports that more than 4,000 public comments were received and that these comments were synthesized by the City to frame issues that were addressed as part of the General Plan Update process. A second Town Hall meeting was held to review preliminary land use and transportation ideas, and a series of three community meetings followed, held in three different parts of the city, to review more refined land use options.

In addition, four citizens' advisory committees were created to guide the General Plan Update. These included a Steering Committee and three subcommittees, including: 1) Economic Development; 2) Environment, Open Space and Sustainable Development; and 3) Infrastructure and Services. These committees met monthly to consider draft segments of the plan, and encouraged public input. The work of these committees also contributed in Chula Vista's Vision Statement and Themes that served as building blocks for the General Plan.⁶ The General Plan was unanimously approved in December of 2005.

⁶ From interviews and *Chula Vista Vision 2020: City of Chula Vista General Plan (2005)*.

Urban Core Specific Plan

The Urban Core Specific Plan (UCSP), begun mid-2004 and now nearly completed, addresses approximately 1,700 acres within the northwestern portion of Chula Vista. This area is generally bordered by the San Diego Freeway to the west, C Street to the north, Del Mar to the East, and L Street to the south. This Specific Plan establishes the framework and guidelines for the next 20-25 years, within the vision set out in the General Plan, to address commercial, housing, transportation and related development intended to enhance the “economic, social, cultural, and recreational fabric of the Urban Core.”⁷

The public engagement process began in summer of 2004⁸ with a two-day charrette process followed by stakeholder interviews, the development of an advisory committee, community meetings (and opportunities for visual simulations), and input by high school age youth. The advisory committee, appointed by the (then) Mayor, had significant responsibilities for considering and recommending plan content. This advisory committee met for several months; however community organizations voiced concerns about the membership of this committee and what they considered to be the insufficient representation and opportunities for neighborhood input. This resulted in a community workshop in April of 2006 in which City staff presented draft elements of the UCSP, with representatives of community organizations⁹ offering concerns and alternatives, followed by a period of questions and answers. At the time of this writing, the Urban Core Specific Plan is on the agenda for action at an upcoming Planning Commission meeting.

Embedded Representation and Voice

The Redevelopment Advisory Committee (RAC) serves as the primary vehicle for public participation in the project approval process of the Chula Vista Redevelopment Corporation

⁷ From *Urban Core Specific Plan Facts*, City of Chula Vista.

⁸ Although it build on the updated General Plan and that plan’s associated engagement

⁹ Crossroads II and Northwest Civics

(CVRC).¹⁰ Building on the established CVRC principles of encouraging public involvement “early and often,”¹¹ the RAC hears proposed redevelopment projects (in a two-step process) that provides developers with early feedback. This allows them to adjust their prospective project in line with RAC recommendations, and to return with a redesign that meets with RAC approval and results in a recommendation for approval to the full CVRC Board. RAC members are selected by their respective participating organizations (community groups, business associations or City technical advisory committees). This membership formula has been a matter of some dispute.

Experimentation has occurred in the form of an “open house” component prior to the formal opening of the meeting, allowing attendees and RAC members to discuss proposed projects (on the evening’s agenda) on a one-to one basis with applicants. The RAC has met in different locations, including a school and the police department, with an interest in helping to ensure a greater accessibility to the public. Notices of the meeting are provided in both English and Spanish and are posted on the City’s Agenda board, on the City’s website, in the Star News, local libraries and recreation centers. They are also mailed directly to property owners surrounding subject projects.

In Summary

These brief descriptions of a number of public engagement approaches employed by City departments are not nearly exhaustive but they suggest the scope and variety of efforts that have been used to seek community and other stakeholder input and deliberation.

Importantly, Chula Vista has a significant and growing experience with public engagement. In some cases, these processes are developed and managed by external consultants and at other times by City staff. Overall, City officials increasingly talk the language of public involvement,

¹⁰ This process is relatively new (established at a 6-22-06 CVRC meeting and is the topic of ongoing discussion; therefore it, and the entire CVRC mechanism, may continue to change.

¹¹ The full set of Principles of Public Input and Participation are: a) early and often; b) open, inclusive and accessible, and c) educational and informative

and there is a generalized expectation, certainly for any significant planning effort, that community and other stakeholder voices should be included.

This need to develop appropriate and inclusive processes may be particularly on the upswing as planning and development has moved (speaking generally) from the less occupied “east” to the older and more populated communities of the “west.”

These efforts have often taken - and continue to take - substantial commitments of agency time and resources. The City staff interviewed for this assessment appear professionally and personally committed to doing this work well, and there are demonstrated efforts of staff seeking to learn from the experiences of other communities.

One view is that Chula Vista has engaged in important “experiments” in civic engagement, and now is poised to move to more sustained, intentional and continually improving (or “adaptive”) level of effort. The City staff who employ these approaches, have opinions of what works and what doesn’t within their own respective orbits of responsibility, but there is less empirical information collected based on any formal criteria of what civic engagement outcomes should look like. There also appears to be a still relatively modest level of conversation and information sharing about public engagement across departments and offices. Formally invited feedback from participants about their experiences in these processes, or from the larger community, also appears more sporadic than optimal.

There have been disagreements about civic engagement design, at least in terms of concerns expressed to the City by organized community groups. However, these “design” disagreements at times seem to be more a matter of “counting votes” in participatory forums rather than a discussion about the how a chosen process may or may not result in new “public knowledge”¹² that will result in reaching better public decisions.

¹² “Public knowledge” is more than simple opinions or preferences about policies or plans. While not necessarily the goal of all public participation, this concept goes deeper and includes elements of common values, acceptable trade-offs, and informed and considered judgments that are offered in a form, and at a time in the policy process, to be effectively integrated into public decision-making. See *Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement* by the Harwood Institute in attached Appendix C.

The authors of *Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement* (see Appendix C) encourage city agency organizers of public involvement processes to answer the following questions:

- Have we properly prepared staff for what they might learn through civic engagement, and are they prepared to deal with the implications?
- Have we framed the appropriate conversations given where we are in the policy process?
- Have we set realistic public expectations given the capacities we have to take action?
- Do we have the necessary voices around the table to gain useful knowledge and make discoveries?
- Have we figured out how to use what we learn and make sure people know their voices are useful?

While not suggested as the last word on the subject, these are, to a degree, a different kind of question that not only City departments but all segments of the community could ask collaboratively to more productively plan and assess public forums.

In general, while a growing array of engagement processes are being put to use, and while individual staff have an increasing familiarity with them, public officials, overall, have far less of a developed sense of the full *continuum* of public engagement options (used by or available to the City) and the strategic purposes and use of each. The same is as generally true for community, business, civic and other groups.

There is an opportunity to build on the public engagement experiments carried out to date; to develop greater skills and capacity on the part of individual City staff and of City departments to design and implement these processes, and to construct the policies and commitments required to ensure their full and sustained appreciation and use.

The manner in which these efforts are understood and “legitimated” by community and other constituent and stakeholder groups is critical to their full success. The following section explores the community’s perceptions of civic engagement.

VIII. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: FINDINGS

It is important to remember that that this is a qualitative assessment and the majority of “community” interviews were with individuals and organizations that tend to have interests in and ongoing involvement with city government. For instance, discussions were held with leadership and, in some cases, members of Northwest Civics, Crossroads II, Southwest Civics, South Bay Forum and others. Findings here are a composite of these and other interviews, the consultant’s impressions of meetings attended, emailed comments, etc. None of the findings necessarily reflect the positions or collective opinion of any organization or group in Chula Vista.

Most of those interviewed credit the City with many good faith efforts at public involvement and recognize the efforts this requires. There were also numerous comments about the dedication and hard work of many city staff who make efforts to involve the community, attend community meetings and respond to questions and information requests from the public.

At the same time there is a pervasive level of mistrust, and a perception that community groups must continue to fight and be vigilant in order to ensure public sector responsiveness.

These perceptions and attitudes can be grouped, and described briefly, as follows:

History: From the Montgomery Annexation to the Espanada controversy, community leaders and residents make claims of secret deals, promises not kept, and bad faith in the solicitation of community voice. The pace of change in the community also contributes, in a multiplicity of ways, to the sense of the government being beyond the control of residents.

Respect: Community groups view themselves as not only representing resident voice but also playing an important leadership development and communication role in the community, educating the public about important issues and informing them of opportunities for civic engagement. Many interviewees believe that the City does not fully recognize these important

civic functions and rather than supporting community organization efforts, they would rather that these groups would “just go away.”¹³

Information-sharing and Responsiveness: A number of individuals suggested that the City is not sufficiently responsive to requests for information from community groups. This may take the form of insufficient or un-translated meeting notices or related documents, or a lack of timely responses to public comments at city commission and other meetings. Whether ideas from the public are - or are not - made a part of a final decision or policy there is a belief that there is insufficient feedback to the community about the uses of such public knowledge. When a decision is made that appears to be inconsistent with public input, community respondents thought it particularly important to explain why the decision was made as it was. There were also comments that while many City staff went out of their way to support community involvement others did not, and that the City leadership was not making this a clear priority across city departments.

Disagreement with Decisions and Policies: There are of course some decisions made by Chula Vista City government with which community groups and residents may simply disagree. These decisions range from building height limits to mobile home park issues. While diverse, many of them relate, directly or indirectly to the kind of community Chula Vista is to be.

Value and Nature of Civic Engagement Processes; There were also criticisms concerning the nature of the civic engagement processes employed in Chula Vista. For instance, the (still developing at that time) RAC arrangement seemed to hold promise for many – and demonstrate City responsiveness - although there was also concern in some quarters about the loss of specific commission voices in the redevelopment approval process. There were also, as noted above, some expressions of concern about the representativeness of certain advisory committee, as well some interviewees wondered about the consistency and follow through of efforts to involve the public. However, aside from these questions, and expressions of concern about responsiveness and feedback in these processes in general, comments about the ins and outs of specific civic engagement processes were fewer in number, and less pointed in general, than in other areas.

¹³ A partial quote from a community resident.

What was present however was a questioning about the City's intent in "doing" civic engagement. Was it because of an authentic interest in community input and a belief that a resulting plan, policy or decision would be improved by that input? Or was it a City effort to set processes in place before – or because – community groups would call for it themselves? Or perhaps to mask already desired plans or desired outcomes? In general, is civic engagement viewed by the City as more or less of a minimum requirement to get work done, rather than representing a committed effort to do the best public involvement possible? There were many such questions as well as comments such as, "we give a lot of input but it never shows up in the results," suggesting a suspicion of the seriousness and the authenticity of the City's civic engagement efforts.

In general, representatives of business groups saw things a bit differently. While favoring public engagement for all sectors, there was some question about whether a limited number of voices were speaking for the community, a concern that community representatives were inadequately informed about the role of business and development in ensuring the financial and overall health and vitality of the City, and some worries about the added time that public involvement could add to plan and project approval.

IX. CITY AND COMMUNITY: RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning for Excellence in Public Involvement

The issuance of a report on civic engagement is at best only a small step toward the potential for more collaborative and effective planning and policymaking. The recommendations in this section suggest possible actions to advance a broader view of civic engagement beyond its use at a given point in time, and to place the development of public involvement capacity more fully on the City's agenda.

15. *This Report should be shared and discussed broadly in city government and in the community. A multi-sector group could be convened by the Council with representative participation by elected officials and city staff, in addition to community members, business, faith-based and other groups, to discuss and hear additional feedback on the Report's findings*

and recommendations. Outreach to traditionally less involved communities should be an essential part of this group's work (see "Inclusion and Access" section below). This group should have the benefit of a facilitator and have assigned staff through the City Manager's or some other office. To the degree possible, a consensus-based and actionable plan and budget supporting public involvement should be prepared and presented by this group to the Council.

16. *If the City is to undertake a more extensive effort toward building civic engagement capacity, a periodic forum on this topic should be developed. For the City itself this may take the form of meetings of senior and other staff having responsibilities for and experiences with public involvement processes, in order to debrief on specific experiences, continue to embed a commitment to appropriate civic engagement in Chula Vista, and/or discuss or support upcoming public involvement efforts. Topics that impact on the effective use of civic engagement, such as the Brown Act, would also be appropriate agenda items.*

17. *An **expanded** forum could involve community, business and other groups who have been participants in public involvement processes or have an interest in civic engagement. This larger forum (that should seek to achieve some consistency of participation once formed) could provide an opportunity to "take stock" of civic engagement efforts in the City, suggest new ideas and adaptations, and build a repository of learning among participants.*

Establishing Commitments

For the use of civic engagement strategies to become embedded in Chula Vista governance, the City's policies and practices should align with and support such efforts. In general, this suggests integration of public engagement ideas into policy, planning and personnel frameworks, the coordination of efforts, and the ability to effectively use what is learned to improve.

18. *In line with an overall plan to strengthen public involvement, the City should establish city-wide performance measures for democratic accountability/civic engagement and request annual assessments and plans from each relevant city department and commission..*

19. *Job performance measures for those City employees whose work involves the development and support of civic engagement should include reflect these responsibilities.*
20. *The City should clarify, amend and disseminate those protocols and policies relating to noticing meetings, advertising public engagement opportunities, and providing responses to questions/comments and public meetings.*
21. *The Council and the City Manager’s Office should provide leadership to ensure adherence, by appropriate city employees and departments, to the City’s principles and commitment to civic engagement, and encourage department planning, and compliance, with such plans on this subject.¹⁴*
22. *Those agencies of the City that plan public involvement processes that facilitate input on public decisions and policies should ensure the development of a complementary communication strategy that will, in a timely way: a) inform the broader community of the work and results of these processes; and b) specifically inform process participants of how the results and recommendations of their deliberation were used and reflected in the ultimate decisions. Additionally, as city department frequently do now, reports and other products that result from public engagement processes should also identify how public input was incorporated into final decision-making.*

Capacity Building/Leadership Development

Developing the interest, knowledge and skills required to understand, manage and participate in public engagement processes will result in better outcomes from these efforts.

23. *Training opportunities should be available for staff engaged in civic engagement efforts to acquaint them with the best practices in this area. This might include skills in facilitation, and an orientation for senior and other appropriate staff on the continuum of public engagement models. Of particular relevance may be an understanding of the purposes and distinctions*

¹⁴ There are plans on the books now of course, for example the Housing Element Objective’s H9.1.1 –H9.1.3, that call for “meaningful public participation”, “bilingual noticing” and “public outreach.”

between efforts at broad public involvement and those that are more focused, stakeholder-based deliberations involving representatives of specific organization or interests.

24. *The City Council might also consider a workshop for its members to review the range of civic engagement that been undertaken in Chula Vista recently and to acquaint themselves with the continuum of public engagement models.*

25. *The City could experiment with offering “planning academies,” on a pilot basis. While often offered on a citywide, county or even regional basis, Chula Vista might offer them in interested and selected communities, especially where significant growth or development is underway or envisioned. Planning academies engage residents, business and community leaders in (usually) a several-week class that provides an overview of the purposes of planning, city (and sometimes county or regional) planning processes, relevant government agencies involved in planning, significant and emerging planning issues, etc . Academies are not generally involved in making or contributing to specific plans. They have the potential for adding to the broader community’s knowledge of, and appreciation for, planning, and also equip participants to participate more knowledgeably in actual planning processes. Some cities have experimented with online planning academies.*

26. *Offering more broadly focused “citizen academies” should also be considered. Citizen academies, often consisting of several weeks of once a week (or more) evening or weekend classes, provide residents with the opportunity to become better acquainted with the purposes, offices and work of city government. Frequently, different city departments may take responsibility for a particular evening class or part of a class.¹⁵ City Commissions may also present information. Benefits accrue to the participants who better understand their city government; and the city gains from more knowledgeable and civically engaged residents.¹⁶ Academy graduates frequently add to the pool of applicants for commission and other civic engagement opportunities. While typically offered city wide, a number of cities hold academies*

¹⁵ While Chula Vista has offered an academy through the Police Department, I don’t believe that academies with a broader scope have been offered.

¹⁶ There is of course no reason why education and information sharing on any topic(s) of interest to a city and it’s residents cannot be offered in other forms and forums that will reach interested members of the community.

geared to specific ethnic communities, with translation as required. See more on this below under Inclusion and Access.

Civic Engagement Process Development and Innovation

Chula Vista is already engaged in encouraging and using public involvement practices that address a range of issues of concern to local government, residents, business interests and others. Of particular importance to ensuring successful efforts are the habits of experimentation, reflection on learning, and the application of what's been learned to the next opportunities for civic engagement.

27. *When pursuing public engagement efforts that bring together individuals or groups from community, business, civic and/or other settings to deliberate and offer input on planning or other matters, the City should, within reasonable bounds, seek to develop these processes, their agendas and informational materials in collaboration or with the informed contributions of participating sectors.*

28. *While not offering specific recommendations on the Chula Vista Redevelopment Corporation's structural approach to project review, the Redevelopment Advisory Committee (RAC) should be recognized for the significant experiment in public and collaborative involvement that it is. While such developments will often, naturally, become the subject of debate, there is frequently less attention paid to assessing what is and is not actually working in relation to their purposes. As with any significant innovation in public involvement in governance, this is a laboratory that the City may mine further.*

Also, as the RAC's composition reflects, at least to some extent, typical interest group politics, attention should be paid to developing the skills and processes that will serve the RAC's deliberative and collaborative requirements to get it's work done in the spirit intended. The idea to have project developers/advocates available informally immediately before the RAC (the "open house" effect), in order to allow information sharing and dialogue with RAC meeting attendees, is an excellent example of adapting more participatory approaches to what can otherwise remain more adversarial processes.

29. *Through the sorts of forums described above, (see Recommendation #16) civic engagement process experiences associated with the General Plan Update (including the Housing Element Plan Update), the Downtown Specific Plan, Bayfront planning process, and other significant Chula Vista planning efforts should be reviewed, once completed, by appropriate City staff and others. The opportunity for assessment (with input from participants) and the generation of an evolving compendium of civic engagement “best practices” for larger scale planning efforts will aid Chula Vista’s ability to embed good civic engagement in City planning.*

30. *The experiences of the Department of Engineering to reach out to the community for input on traffic-related matters seems to offer a model for how other city departments may secure community input on public works and city services-oriented matters. While not taking the place of input by other relevant groups and stakeholders, the capacity of the city to identify the affected population of a proposed public works or services matter – or to respond to concerns about such matters from the community – and to support the development of local committees that can deliberate and offer their recommendations, and then to facilitate these ideas being placed before area residents for a vote, is of great value.*

While understanding that this effort may have been cut back due to budget constraints, the City is encouraged to assess this effort in some detail if it has not already done so, with input from participating community residents, identifying the techniques and the resources required for successful implementation. An examination of how these same approaches might be used in relation to other public works and service-related issues is warranted as well. If other appropriate areas of application are identified, a pilot effort might be undertaken, with experienced staff from Engineering sharing experiences and models. If found successful, this approach might become an important and “embedded” option in Chula Vista for securing public voice on appropriate matters.

31. *There has been some interest in the development of a formal system of city recognized and supported neighborhood associations – or perhaps community planning groups – that would have designated responsibilities for input and recommendations in certain areas of public decision making (typically planning and land use matters). There were both community*

residents and local officials interviewed who believe this is an avenue the City should consider. The recommendation here is for the City to move carefully in this regard. Experience around the country is mixed in terms of the success of these institutionalized mechanisms, and creating new systems from scratch is a significant undertaking. Further, only when a city is committed to this approach and prepared to fully resource the effort will it have any chance of success.

One strategy would be for the City to first move on those recommendations in this Report that would serve to: a) ensure an “infrastructure” for learning from and improving upon present efforts; b) develop an appropriate continuum of (generally) less institutionalized opportunities for involvement; and c) create additional leadership, informed participation and support for these efforts. It is likely that, if these steps occurred, movement toward a formal system of neighborhood councils or planning groups would be more successful.

Then, interim steps toward such city-recognized neighborhood-based “institutions” might include one or both of the following ideas, accompanied by a survey of the experiences that other cities have had with such initiatives, and with an assessment of the results achieved in Chula Vista:

A. Chula Vista could explore a more formal and “contractual” relationship with an existing community organization; a pilot effort in effect. This might entail both more support by the City for the organization, especially for its efforts to share relevant civic engagement opportunities and background information with its members and other residents and/or to “co-produce” process opportunities for public involvement.¹⁷ A facilitated “learning forum”¹⁸ might also be held involving the community group and a city department that wanted to establish a partnership through which the community group would help to shape or guide the department’s services or neighborhood improvements in some fashion.

¹⁷ It is frequently difficult for community groups with limited resources to take a full role into public engagement efforts, and creatively maximizing resources can have short and long-range benefits. A section on “Institutional Support and Recognition” in *Environmental Justice: Opportunity, Assessment and Analysis*, UC Santa Cruz makes some of these points.

¹⁸ Los Angeles had some success using such facilitated forums to shape these community/city partnerships.

B. A pilot “community planning group” could be tested in a given community, through an existing group or with a new organization developed solely for this purpose. Following the review of experiences of such efforts elsewhere, the Council could enumerate the appropriate operating procedures and responsibilities of such a pilot community planning group, clarify the responsibilities of the City planning department and/or other agencies in the effort, and after a reasonable period, with the planning group, the results of the pilot effort and whether it should be expanded.

In either case, it is suggested that building up and out from the practical experience of a limited on-the-ground experiment would lead to more success in Chula Vista than would immediately initiating a more extensive citywide effort.

32. To be successful in attracting younger and busy participants to public engagement, a variety of additional means for them to communicate their thoughts and opinions should be considered. These would have to be tailored and appropriate for a given process of course. For instance, in addition to a typical public forum which may include several hours of dialogue and deliberation, such gatherings could offer: a) one-on-one opportunities to speak with relevant city department staff; b) chart paper on which individuals may record their ideas; c) a court reporter-like resource who can type in (again one-on-one) exactly what people have to say; or d) an on-site computer terminal available for people to write their own emails to the staff on the matter under consideration. These are particularly appropriate for direct individual input rather than where more deliberative and collective ideas are the goal.

Storyboarding¹⁹ is another tool that allows a great many ideas, from a larger number of people, in a relatively short period of time. Also, increasing the opportunities for online participation (as in the Housing Element Plan Update), including web dialogue formats, can also be appropriate options. It can also be useful for background informational materials to be made available online or by computer disks available before or at public meetings.

¹⁹ Meeting attendees, after receiving information about and discussing the topic at hand, each write down, on their own paper, their vision, ideas, solutions, etc. as appropriate to the topic, and then tape the paper to the wall. Participants may walk around and view these comments. Typically these ideas may be grouped together in appropriate themes following the meeting and

In addition to a wider range of public involvement tools, developing engagement opportunities in conjunction with organizations of younger and more diverse residents (such as schools and their parents associations) can prove useful. The point here is simply that many options exist for public participation, and options in engagement models may enlarge the total number and type of participants. (Also see section on Inclusion and Access below.)

33. There were one or two voices among those interviewed that expressed, more or less directly, a concern about whether Chula Vista was more than the sum of its parts. In other words, were residents feeling part of Chula Vista, or more connected to just one section of town? This may be tied to former annexations, a sense of uneven growth and development, feelings of disenfranchisement, etc. This Report only identifies this small number of comments, and suggests that there would be dialog and other public involvement options for grappling with this dynamic if it's perceived to have substance.

Community Organization and City Relationship Building

The relationship of Chula Vista public officials with leaders and members of community organizations may be better than they themselves believe. This Report's author heard numerous remarks from community residents who expressed acknowledgement and appreciation for local officials and their efforts to engage the community; and from local officials, about community groups and their efforts to inform residents about important public issues. At the same time, the mistrust and suspicion described above is equally real and intrudes into the effective use of public involvement options.

While, again, the goal is not and should not be simply harmony, the ability of the various City departments to work in collaboration with local community organizations in the construction, review and ongoing adaptation of a structure - or continuum - of civic engagement options is important. While some of the following recommendations could be placed in other sections of this Report, they seem particularly relevant here.²⁰

²⁰ Any recommendations offered here to community organizations are made generally and with no effort to draw distinctions among groups. Especially as these organizations did not ask the Institute for Local Government for

34. *Given the levels of mistrust that exist in some quarters of the community about the City's commitment to public involvement - and the frustrations on the part of some public officials over what they feel are unfair comments and criticisms by members of community groups - some appropriate "airing" of concerns might help clear the air and facilitate ongoing work and relationships. Without suggesting that grand transformations or specific agreements would result, there is experience to indicate that a well-prepared and facilitated session (or sessions), with ground rules and a good facilitator, can provide a safe and respectful opportunity for mutual expression and understanding of concerns.*²¹

35. *In Recommendation 30A, the idea is presented that as a pilot effort the City might consider entering into a relationship with one (or more) community organizations for activities that could enhance public involvement. This in recognition of the important role played by these organizations in the City's overall civic engagement and leadership development. A larger, more visioning-like effort might be developed in which the City and the major community organizations might jointly explore and reach agreements on topics such as:*

- *Shared principles of civic engagement*
- *Responsibilities for relevant community public involvement design*
- *Information sharing*
- *Agreements relating to communicating concerns to one another*
- *Process for joint "fact finding" if research, documents or background materials that relate to a public involvement process are questioned.*
- *Possible joint support of newly developing community organizations*
- *Exploring possible funding of collaborative City and community public engagement capacity building.*

feedback on their work, this Report's author asks for their understanding in his efforts to make a set of suggestions in support good civic engagement.

²¹ This idea is offered tentatively and with the understanding that this would be an unusual - but not without precedent - undertaking for public officials and residents alike. One approach is for speakers to simply and briefly express their concerns through an "I message" formula and perhaps provide an example of what a preferred behavior or scenario would look like. Responses are not typically allowed. An "I message" is simply a way of expressing a concern that contains information about an unappreciated behavior and the impact of that behavior on the speaker. It does not assume the motivation of the other, or blame or draw conclusions.

36. *Especially within a framework of Recommendation #34 above, community organizations²² may find it useful to assess how they become stronger partners in community engagement, through such achievements as greater diversity of membership, more effective outreach and education (especially regarding significant public issues), stronger internal operating systems, ongoing leadership development, etc.*²³

X. INCLUSION AND ACCESS: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated earlier, Chula Vista is a diverse community, and a community in all its diversity needs to feel welcomed into public engagement opportunities. At the same time this diversity poses challenges of time, method and sometimes cost for those planning or holding such civic involvement activities. It can also feel risky.

There is no single set of recommendations or ideas that can contain all that might be done in this regard; what is most needed is an awareness that the community is constantly changing, that residents and their organizations deserve a place at the table, and that reaching beyond one's own experience and knowledge frequently opens up new understanding about how a greater inclusion can be achieved.

(Note: The Institute for Local Government, entirely at its own expense, has contracted for two focus groups to be held in Chula Vista that involve Hispanic residents and solicit information on civic engagement. The results of these groups were not available at the time of this writing, but will be added as a Report Appendix as soon as possible.)

Recommendations here derive from interviews held as a part of the Chula Vista civic engagement needs assessment, and from the Institute's experience.

²² Again, the reference is a general one to a number of organizations, each of whom would have different needs in this regard. It is also important to stress the limited financial resources of these organizations.

²³ Assessment interviews turned up a ripple of tension between resident/geography-based organizations and those organized more around specific issue advocacy. Attention to these dynamics, if and as appropriate, may be warranted by the groups involved.

37. *Recognizing that, first and foremost, all relevant laws and policies must be observed, it will be useful for any local agency that solicits public involvement in governance to regularly review the means by which those with disabilities have full access to notices, meetings and materials.*

38. *There should be continued support for the Chula Vista Youth Advisory Commission, with young people solicited and included in public engagement processes. Youth Commission members themselves can also help to engage other youth in such processes and hold their own forums to encourage youth participation on important issues.*

39. *The City should expand its capacity for translation of public meetings and related civic engagement sessions. Easily mobile and digital meeting translation equipment should be available to agencies requiring it for their public meetings, and appropriate staff and “contract” translators should be trained in its use.*²⁴

40. *The City should explore the potential for website translation. A number of cities are providing the option for their city website users to click a website icon and have the choice for immediate translation into a number of languages.*

41. *Many public meeting notices in the press are limited to a single English language newspaper.*²⁵ *The City should expand its noticing protocols in order to expand the reach of these notices into more diverse populations, and existing plans for bilingual noticing should be assessed as they proceed. In addition to added cost, challenges are acknowledged, especially as they relate to the variety of Spanish language print media and their regional and trans-border markets. It may be worth the effort for the City to intentionally “test” the appropriate outlets that are available, using each for a time and evaluating the results.*

42. *As is being done with the Planning Commission, RAC and other Chula Vista government meetings, moving meetings that are intended to solicit public participation and input out into*

²⁴ It is often the case that meeting translation resources, when available, may be little used, especially at first. Translation alone is not usually a solution as outreach, accessible location, supportive organizing and more will make the difference. The availability of such resources are, however, understood by non-English speaking communities as symbolic of the public sector’s commitment to hearing their voices. The same could be said of the availability of translated draft or final public plans and documents.

²⁵ Planning and Building now uses bilingual noticing for all land use decision-making processes.

those communities characterized by less public participation can be helpful. However, this will be most effective if accompanied by the support of local groups and appropriate outreach.

*43. The City could develop print and online resources to promote civic engagement among newcomers to Chula Vista. These could be integrated into the activities of schools, churches, community and leadership groups, local government, relevant media and others.*²⁶

44. Both appropriate city staff and representative members of community organizations would benefit from ongoing opportunities to identify methods of culturally competent public involvement, and to specifically review these aspects of the City's civic engagement processes. Exchanges with representatives and members of Chula Vista's diverse communities on these topics is recommended.

45. In Recommendation #24 and #25, the ideas for "planning academies" and "citizen academies" were presented whereby participants learn about the workings of city government generally or planning processes in particular, and the City gains more informed and engaged residents who are more likely to take part in other public involvement opportunities. The City should consider offering citizens academies in Spanish, and in English with Spanish translation.

*These should be organized in collaboration with, or with the support of, a number of Hispanic intermediary organizations (or institutions that have a significant Hispanic participation, such as schools) in the City and region that can assist in publicizing these events and recruiting residents.*²⁷ *These academies should include information about opportunities for further engagement and civic and political leadership development, and City agencies seeking to enhance inclusion in should have access to academy participant contact information. If not presently offered, the Police Department should consider offering an academy in Spanish - or bilingually - as well.*

²⁶ Santa Clara County in Northern California publishes, in several languages, a hard copy and online version of Immigrant Rights, Responsibilities and Resources Guidebook for the 34% of their population who are immigrant to the United States. Included are sections on "Getting Involved: How Local Government Works" and "Voting and Civic Action."

²⁷ Hispanic residents in Chula Vista differ of course, along the lines of English competency, time in the US, socio-economic status, and much more. Outreach and recruitment - and perhaps academy content - has to take these distinctions into consideration.

46. *To the degree possible, a specific and longer term plan should be developed by the City for the inclusion of immigrant communities in the political life of Chula Vista, including boards, commissions, and planning-related and other public involvement opportunities. As with any plan it should be reviewed and amended over time. Components of such a plan could contain both elements of this Report and ideas generated by other sources. It would of course be useful to develop such a plan in consultation with members, representatives and advocates of the appropriate Chula Vista communities.*²⁸ (Also see Recommendation #41 that could complement this effort.)

*Community-based and intermediary organizations, including grassroots leadership groups, religious organizations, schools and community-specific media, can also assist with general education and recruitment for specific public forums, and help provide two-way conduits for communication between government and community residents on specific issues and policies. Staff should solicit the support of such organizations and seek to build ongoing alliances and relationships with them to encourage participation over time.*²⁹

XI. CONCLUSION

Public involvement processes will not end conflict and controversy. Especially in a rapidly growing and changing community such as Chula Vista, there will be distinct differences of opinion about the City's future. This is as it should be. However, well designed and supported civic engagement practices will bring the city's residents and other stakeholders to the table on relevant matters, minimize unnecessary conflict and misinformation, help local officials better understand what is valued by city residents, and, frequently, create greater support and consensus for what will be better plans, policies and other public decisions.

Chula Vista's public, civic and business sectors have a great deal of experience with a variety of public involvement methods to date and are demonstrating a commitment to their use. The City is poised to do much more.

²⁸ For further research and recommendations on immigrant civic integration and engagement see: *Immigrants and Local Governance: The View from City Hall*, Ramakrishnan and Lewis, Public Policy Institute of California, 2005; and *Pursuing Democracy's Promise: Newcomer Civic Participation in America*, Craig McGarvey, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, 2004.

²⁹ In some cases these typically under-resourced organizations may need financial support to provide assistance.

It is not, however, questions about particular processes of public involvement that are the largest stumbling block to a community's success in achieving a high level of civic engagement. More often, the obstacles are:

- a) The need to transcend years of remembered incidents characterized by mistrust and suspicion;
- b) Perceptions of inconsistent or incomplete efforts at public involvement;
- c) Failure to pay *collaborative* attention (by all sectors) to civic engagement as a subject of attention in itself rather than solely as a means to address specific issues or crises that occur one by one and whose subject matter almost always entails strong feelings and divisiveness;
- d) Lack of a commitment and a capacity to experiment, reflect on what's been learned, and apply new knowledge to future public engagement efforts;
- e) Shallow city "ownership" of public involvement that cannot survive transitions in political leadership; and
- f) Too little responsiveness to the needs for community and cultural competence that will assure that the full diversity of the population is prepared, welcomed and involved.

These obstacles, suggested by this assessment's findings and by the experiences of other communities, can be addressed only by the concerted activities of all sectors of the community over time. The recommendations offered in this Report will hopefully provide a starting point for this effort and for a more collaborative Chula Vista.

xii.

Appendices

Appendix A



Interview Questions for Chula Vista City Commission Chairs

The Institute for Local Government is working with the City of Chula Vista to carry out a civic engagement assessment that seeks to understand the forms and experiences of public involvement in Chula Vista and to offer recommendations to the City on improving those practices that encourage and support such involvement in public decision and policy making.

One aspect of this review is the recognition of the important role played by residents who sit on city commissions and of the role of these commissions in local governance.

Attached is a list of questions we would like to ask you about your Commission's work. You may respond to these questions electronically – or we can interview you personally over the phone or in person. If you wish, you may want to query other commission members for their input as well.

The process for completing this questionnaire is as follows:

- 1. We talk to you briefly to ensure our purpose and questionnaire instructions are clear*
- 2. You download this document, answer the questions as you see fit, save the changes, and send the completed document back to us as an attachment, and*
- 3. We follow up with you by phone to clarify or ask you to amplify on any response (as needed).*

You are not limited to this set of questions – please add anything you think we ought to know. Specific comments will not be attributed without your permission, and completed questionnaires will not be shared with anyone.

We greatly appreciate your time and contributions to this inquiry. If you have questions, please contact Terry Amsler, Director of the Institute for Local Government, at 916.658.8263 or at tamsler@ca-ilg.org. Thank you very much.

BACKGROUND

Date questionnaire completed:

Name/Title of person completing the questionnaire:

Name of Commission:

What is the commission's purpose/substantive areas of responsibility?

When was the commission established, and why?

When did you (the Chair) volunteer as a Commission member and how long have you served?

MEMBERSHIP/SELECTION/APPOINTMENT

How many Commission membership slots are there, and how many are filled presently?

How are commission members identified/selected?

Does commission have criteria for skills/expertise/viewpoints needed?

What are membership and chair terms of office, and how much turnover is there?

What are the recruitment methods, and is an interest list maintained (and by who)?

Is there communication with those on the interest list? Of what sort?

PREPARATION/EDUCATION

Once seated, are there any sort of orientation opportunities relating to the commission's work and its place in Chula Vista local government?

Are there opportunities for ongoing education/training?

Do you think new members are well prepared for Commission membership? How so, and how not so?

WORK: PLANNING & ASSESSMENT, RELATIONSHIPS

Does the commission carry out any sort of annual work plan and/or assessment?

How would you characterize the working relationships of the commission and council; the commission and staff?

Do council members ever attend Commission meetings? Have there been any joint meetings for any purpose? Please describe.

Generally, how are Commission recommendations received and acted upon by the Council? DO Commission member feel “heard”?

Do you see perceive any overlap or duplication with other commissions?

Do city commissions rarely/often/never offer contradictory recommendations?

COMMISSION MEETINGS

Describe a typical commission meeting?

How is public testimony heard?

Is their translation capability (by staff, members, others?)

Do the meeting formats ever differ? If so, how and for what reason?

How are agendas set?

Who typically attends?

Where are meeting usually held?

Has there ever been translation offered at your commission meetings?

How are meetings advertised?

How are records of meetings and specific motions prepared/written and communicated to the Council and others?

Do you feel that the Commission’s work is recognized and valued by the public, council, staff, or others (how so, and how not so)?

LOOKING AHEAD

Is your commission’s role changing and/or should it change it to fulfill its mission?

Could the city be more supportive in terms of valuing: a) the work of commissions and commissioners; and b) the voice of the public heard through commissions? How?

What, if anything, could the commission itself do to assess and/or improve its own work?

Final thoughts?

Appendix B



Civic Engagement Assessment- Chula Vista Questions for City Departments

The Institute for Local Government is working with the City of Chula Vista to carry out a civic engagement assessment that seeks to understand the forms and experiences of public involvement in Chula Vista and to offer recommendations to the City on improving those practices that encourage and support such involvement in public decision and policy making.

While public involvement, like the terms “civic engagement” or “collaborative governance,” can mean many different things, our interest is primarily in how residents and other members of the public can more directly participate in decisions that relate to public services and policies that they care about. Our assumption is that such public involvement exists within the framework of representative government and the ultimate action of public officials. In other words, we are talking about more direct public participation but not direct democracy.

One important aspect of this review is to understand the public involvement-related interests and practices of city departments, especially given the critical role of these local agency departments to the success of any effective public involvement efforts over time.

Attached is a list of questions relating to public involvement and your Department. You may respond to electronically – or we can interview you over the phone or in person. While we don’t intend to circulate the responses or attribute any of them to specific individuals or departments, please contact me if you’d feel more comfortable responding orally.

The process for completing this questionnaire is as follows:

- 4. We talk to you briefly to ensure our purpose and questionnaire instructions are clear*
- 5. You download this document, answer the questions as you see fit, save the changes, and send the completed document back to us as an attachment, and*
- 6. We follow up with you by phone to clarify or ask you to amplify on any response (as needed).*

You are not limited to this set of questions – please add anything you think we ought to know but neglected to ask.

We greatly appreciate your time and contributions to this inquiry. If you have questions, please contact Terry Amsler, Director of the Institute for Local Government, at 916.658.8263 or at tamsler@ca-ilg.org. Thank you very much.

1. Name and title of person completing questionnaire
2. Name of city department
3. Briefly, please describe your Department's areas of responsibility
4. Briefly, describe your responsibilities
5. What are your "first reactions" to the idea of public involvement: including your (general) experiences, opinions, and expectations?
6. For area(s) of Department work where public involvement **has been used and/or is presently most developed:**
 - A. Please provide concrete examples of this involvement, and please be as detailed as you can.

(If you give multiple examples, please make sure you are clear here and below in your comments about which examples of public involvement you are talking about. These examples can be of an ongoing effort, or more episodic in nature relating to specific responsibilities of your department.)
 - B. What are/were the goals of the identified public involvement efforts?
 - C. Describe how the generated public input was/is used in the shaping and delivery of services, or in the public decision or policy making of local officials.
 - D. In your opinion, how are these efforts working, and what areas need improvement?
 - E. How do you think the public ("organized" and "unorganized") views these efforts?
 - F. Are these efforts trusted, do you think? Why or why not?
 - G. How does your staff view the efforts?
 - H. How do you view them?
 - I. If you could create a more "perfect" public involvement process/mechanism, how would it be different than what exists now?

J. How could you be better supported in these public involvement efforts (if at all) by:

- 1) City staff leadership?
- 2) Elected leadership?
- 3) Civic, Business, Community and/or Faith communities?
- 4) Any Others?

K. What will be required for these public involvement efforts to be embedded or “institutionalized” in the agency/city over time?

7. Are there other areas of (your) Department work where you believe some form of public involvement might be useful and contribute to departmental effectiveness? Please be as specific as you can about the area, the need, and (if you have a sense of it) the nature the appropriate public involvement.
8. If appropriate, how could your Department be better prepared to help ensure input from those parts of the community that are less organized or where English is not the first language?
9. Does your Department have performance/accountability goals or measures relating to public involvement or democratic accountability? If so, what are they?
10. Are there statutes, codes or other legal or policy frameworks that suggest or require the public involvement efforts (beyond traditional public hearings) that you have underway?
11. Can you identify other incentives (of any kind) that you think encourages your department to pursue public involvement activities? And conversely, what factors impede such undertakings?
12. What would you want the public to most understand about your department and its public involvement efforts?
13. Anything else you'd like add relating to public involvement approaches and processes?
14. If there are documents/sources that authorize, describe and/or report on your Department's public involvement efforts, please attach or send them, or provide links.

Appendix C

Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement

*How Public Agencies Can Learn from the Community,
Use What They Learn, and Demonstrate
that Public Knowledge Matters*



PREPARED BY THE HARWOOD INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC INNOVATION WITH THE
SUPPORT OF THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION

About The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation helps people imagine and act for the public good. We seek nothing less than to spark fundamental change in American public life – to inspire, engage, and connect people to tap their own potential for action and to give their efforts voice and power in society. In its 17th year, The Harwood Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works within a long tradition of small, catalytic, and public-spirited organizations in American history that have sought to improve public life and politics.

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Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement

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Public agencies across the nation are under increasing pressure to engage the public. Some agencies feel this pressure because they have failed to meet the public's expectations, or they are seen as disconnected from the public and must regain its trust. Others are trying to figure out how best to allocate scarce public resources or make tough decisions.

Whatever the reason, it is important to ask: What does it really mean to engage the public? What rewards and risks await those who pursue this path? How can civic engagement be more than attempts at good public relations, or another invitation for people simply to make demands on limited public resources?

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation asked The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation to develop a strategic action tool for public agencies to figure out when to do civic engagement, whether it has made a difference, and to gauge their own readiness even to undertake this work. Our goal is to provide a resource that lays out clear standards that must be met to make civic engagement truly meaningful for both public agencies and the people they serve.

Making a Cultural Change

At its essence, civic engagement is important so that public agency leaders and staff can lead and serve their communities with genuine authority, authenticity and accountability.



The 3 A's of Public Life

Genuine **authority** (the type derived from community credibility not statute or title) is earned through one's knowledge of the community and infusing that knowledge through one's work. **Authenticity** is one's ability to reflect the reality of people's lives in word and deed. Genuine **accountability** is measured by whether a public agency pursues actions that are truly meaningful to the community.

At The Harwood Institute we call these the "3 A's of Public Life." Meaningful civic engagement is a prerequisite for having authority, authenticity, and accountability. The 3 A's are only possible when a public agency genuinely listens to the community and acts on what it learns.


The 3 A's can only become embedded in an agency when civic engagement becomes part of that agency's very culture. Agency leaders and staff must come to understand and value learning from the public, even challenging people to think beyond their initial views. Processes must exist to feed newfound knowledge into the daily operations of the agency – from how discussions are framed and take place to how decisions are made.

Eventually new organizational practices and reflexes will develop that strengthen the agency's ability to fulfill its core mission. But agencies that successfully engage the public must commit organizational resources – especially time and focus – to ensure engagement can be done well.

Making Engagement Count

Meaningful civic engagement requires discipline – to be clear about one's real intentions, mindful of whom you have engaged and who is missing from the conversation, and thoughtful about the questions you ask. It means listening in a way that enables you to make new discoveries and paying attention to work practices to ensure that civic engagement informs your day-to-day work.

Those who successfully embrace our standards of excellence in civic engagement have the potential to infuse their agency with a renewed public spirit – a spirit that originally drew many public servants to their work in the first place. It is my hope that as you work through this tool, it will spark within you a newfound sense of possibility for helping your agency move forward with its important public work.



Richard C. Harwood
President and Founder
The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation

What is civic engagement – *really*?

As a public agency practitioner that works with members of your community, you are – or certainly should be – in the business of *civic engagement*. But what does that mean?

Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to consider what civic engagement is *not*. People tend to group any and all interactions with the public under the umbrella of civic engagement when in fact, not all situations we confront call for this very specific kind of interaction.

For instance, sometimes different notions of “public relations” are included under the umbrella of civic engagement. This confusion can lead to misplaced expectations and unaccomplished goals – by all those involved. Consider when a public agency might want the community to have a better understanding of what it does and why. In this case, basic communications are in order. At other times, elected officials might want to rally the community behind a sales tax increase (or decrease) or a mill levy to raise resources to fulfill their responsibilities. These circumstances clearly call for advocacy.

Civic engagement is appropriate when an agency is seeking to learn from the public. But learning is more than simply soliciting input, adding up the responses, and using that data to make a decision that is allegedly supported by citizens. It is about gaining and using *public knowledge*.

Public knowledge is a full and deep understanding of your community. It is a collection of values that people in the community hold – not their attitudes about various policy choices. It is also about how they rank these values, and what trade-offs they are willing to make when the values seem to be in conflict. This kind of knowledge can only be gained through meaningful civic engagement.

What will this tool do for me?

Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement is roadmap for you as a public agency practitioner to know that you are on the right path – that your agency is truly in the business of civic engagement. That means that your agency is collecting public knowledge to build greater authority, authenticity, and accountability within the community you serve. The Harwood Institute calls these the 3 A's of Public Life because they are the essential characteristics everyone and every institution in public life should aspire to exhibit. The 3 A's are detailed in the foreword.

Other tools that we have produced focus on the “how to's” of civic engagement such as deciding what issues to talk about and who to listen to; how to design and lead effective conversations; figuring out what you heard in engagement conversations; and how to follow up after you've engaged the public. This tool, however, won't answer those



Public agencies should be in the business of collecting public knowledge to build greater authority, authenticity, and accountability within the communities they serve.

questions. Instead, it provides the four key standards every agency must meet to achieve excellence in civic engagement; benchmarks for how you will know that you're meeting these standards; and pay-offs for why it is worth achieving them. The Harwood Institute can certainly help with the how-to's; there is a reference guide at the end of the tool that will direct you to some materials that may interest you. There are also a host of organizations around the country that specialize in helping organizations set up and manage civic engagement processes.

This tool is important for making certain, first and foremost, that you're in the right game. As you organize and develop civic engagement processes, it will help you answer key questions such as:

- Have we properly prepared staff for what they might learn through civic engagement, and are they prepared to deal with the implications?
- Have we framed the appropriate conversations given where we are in the policy process?
- Have we set realistic public expectations given the capacities we have to take action?
- Do we have the necessary voices around the table to gain useful knowledge and make discoveries?
- Have we figured out how to use what we learn and make sure people know their voices are useful?

As you work through these and other questions, you will begin to find the path of civic engagement that will best serve your agency and community.

What are the standards?

Public agencies that achieve excellence in civic engagement:

1. Are in the business of **collecting public knowledge**.
2. **Use public knowledge** internally over time.
3. **Communicate back to the public** how public knowledge has influenced the agency and how staff and managers are using that knowledge.
4. **Cultivate the culture, norms, reflexes, and habits** that will make civic engagement a central part of how the agency conducts its business.

Civic engagement will yield the best results when a public agency strives to hit each of these standards. Like an ecosystem, each of the standards supports and reinforces the others. The interconnectedness of each of these standards for civic engagement excellence is why it is important for public agencies to strive to reach each standard.

If you use this tool on a regular basis, if you take a good hard look in the mirror and ask, "What are we doing really well, and what can we do better?" and if you take your own answers to heart, you will discover ways to make civic engagement much more meaningful for your agency and your community. Striving for excellence requires this kind of examination.

The most effective way to work through the tool is to go through the materials for each standard in the order they are presented. The activities and questions build on one another and are designed to help you assess your own agency as candidly and effectively as possible. However, whether you tackle each standard in order or skip around is entirely up to you.

Standard 1

Collect Public Knowledge

The key purpose of any civic engagement activity should always be to learn from and about the people you are engaging. Real learning, however, doesn't lead to a collection of information. Instead, it leads to public knowledge. As previously mentioned, public knowledge is more than people's preferences about various policy choices. It's about the common values people hold, as well as the trade-offs they are willing to make when those values are in conflict (and with tough public issues, they usually are).

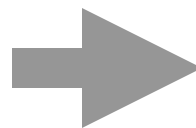
Public agencies that achieve excellence in civic engagement are in the business of collecting public knowledge.

Benchmarks

How do you know you're making progress toward reaching this standard?

- ☐ **Your agency adopts learning objectives for the knowledge staff are seeking.** You will want to have measures set in place so that you know when you have the knowledge you need. For example, are you trying to uncover people's values around education, or the environment in your community, or if you already have a sense of their values, do you need to learn what trade-offs they are willing to make? People might value having choices in health care, for example, but they might also value access for everyone at all income levels. These values might be hard to reconcile, so the question is: what are people willing to give up?
- ☐ **Your agency implements a strategy for collecting public knowledge on an ongoing basis.** This means that you don't simply engage the public to find solutions to problems, but you have some kind of regularly occurring civic engagement with the public that allows you to continually learn and build on your public knowledge.
- ☐ **Your agency uses engagement processes that lead to gaining public knowledge.** You will want to set up your public conversations in a way that allows people to engage one another so that they can share common values and wrestle with tough issues where values may be in conflict. The "stand up for two minutes at the mic" approach to traditional public meetings will not lead to public knowledge.

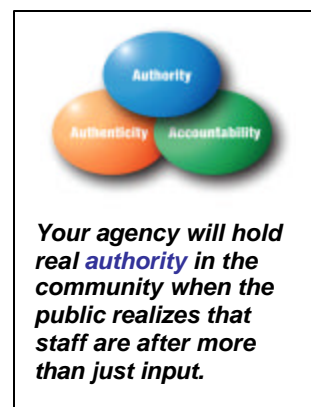
See Appendix B: Reference Guide for tools that will help you reach these benchmarks.



Pay-Offs

Why is it worth trying to achieve this standard?

- Real public knowledge will lead to better, more widely accepted decisions.
- There will be more public confidence in your agency's decision-making.
- Your agency will build a deep knowledge of the community that doesn't go away when staff leave.



Reflection Questions

1. What are some things we are doing to work toward meeting this standard?

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2. Of the benchmarks listed, which ones are we meeting?

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3. How can we work on meeting the benchmarks we are deficient in?

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Standard 2

Use Public Knowledge

Public agencies have a responsibility to build public knowledge over time, but they must also be willing to allow that knowledge to influence their work – even if that sometimes means changing course. It is not enough to simply engage citizens to build a repository of their hopes and aspirations for the community.

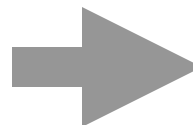
Public agencies that achieve excellence in civic engagement use public knowledge internally over time.

Benchmarks

How do you know you're making progress toward reaching this standard?

- ☐ **Your agency implements processes and procedures for sharing public knowledge internally and in a timely way.** This is important because for public knowledge to truly influence the agency's work, staff throughout the agency must be equipped with the same knowledge and be "working from the same playbook" in a sense.
- ☐ **Your agency makes certain that public knowledge is considered and applied in internal decision-making.** It is not enough to figure out ways to make the public feel like their voice is important. Your agency needs to have a method for seriously considering public knowledge in all major decisions that affect the public – not just the ones where it might be convenient or has been mandated by higher-ups.
- ☐ **Your agency uses established protocols for tracking how public knowledge has influenced the agency's decision-making.** It is important to make sure you know where public knowledge is impacting your work. It will lead to more learning but will also allow you to communicate more effectively with the public about why you are seeking to engage them.

See Appendix B: Reference Guide for tools that will help you reach these benchmarks.



Pay-Offs

Why is it worth trying to achieve this standard?

- Using public knowledge will help you make tough decisions that people will be able to live with, even if they don't agree.
- Civic engagement will drive your work and won't just be another activity staff has to check off of their "to-do" list.



*Your agency will be demonstrating **authenticity**, and staff will be exercising **accountability** among one another, if you use public knowledge internally over time.*

Reflection Questions

1. What are some things we are doing to work toward meeting this standard?

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2. Of the benchmarks listed, which ones are we meeting?

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3. How can we work on meeting the benchmarks we are deficient in?

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Standard 3

Communicate

Collecting public knowledge, building the internal norms and habits for civic engagement, and using public knowledge in your work will go a long way in helping your agency build genuine authority and authenticity. But in order to be truly accountable to the public, it is important to make communicating with them a priority as well, so that they know their voice is valued – and useful – in the policy process.

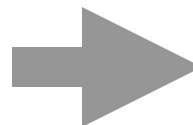
Public agencies that achieve excellence in civic engagement communicate back to the public how public knowledge has influenced the agency and how staff and managers are using that knowledge.

Benchmarks

How do you know you're making progress toward reaching this standard?

- ☐ **Your agency understands what public knowledge to share with citizens and shares it in a timely way.** Meeting minutes aren't helpful to anyone, so it's important for agency staff to have procedures for compiling the essence of what they learned in the meetings – the real public knowledge – and develop procedures to share that with the public.
- ☐ **Your agency regularly shares with the public how their voice is impacting the agency's work.** In addition to simply sharing knowledge, public agencies should always tie that knowledge back to how it has impacted the agency's decision-making process. That should include the whole story – where the agency has had to struggle with knowledge and how to use it, the tensions that agency staff face, and how they work through those tensions to find the best ways to incorporate public knowledge into their work.
- ☐ **Your agency uses methods for measuring how well the public understands where their voice has impacted the agency's work.** Agencies that achieve this standard will be able to gauge whether the public knows that public knowledge is influencing the agency's work. This way, the agency can make corrections if there is a disconnect between the agency's work and where the public sees itself fitting into that work.

See Appendix B: Reference Guide for tools that will help you reach these benchmarks.



Pay-Offs

Why is it worth trying to achieve this standard?

- The public will become more involved in civic engagement when they see that it is making a difference.
- Support for engagement among elected officials and decision-makers will increase over time.
- People will be more likely to step forward and help solve public problems, instead of expecting the agency to do it all.



Your agency will be building stronger **accountability** with the community by communicating back what they learn from civic engagement.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some things we are doing to work toward meeting this standard?

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2. Of the benchmarks listed, which ones are we meeting?

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3. How can we work on meeting the benchmarks we are deficient in?

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Standard 4

Culture, Norms, Reflexes, and Habits

Being in the business of collecting public knowledge is more than just creating engagement processes. It takes a new way of thinking and acting both within your agency and with the public you serve. To achieve excellence in civic engagement, engaging the public has to be an integral part of how you do your work. Within the agency there must exist what we call a culture of learning – an environment where people are always trying to increase their public knowledge. To build that culture of learning, staff and managers have to adopt new norms for how they think about the public and their value to the agency's work; new reflexes, so that they are always in the mode of asking the kinds of questions that lead to public knowledge; and habits that make seeking out public knowledge and using that knowledge instinctive.

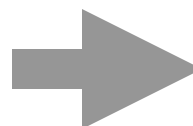
Public agencies that achieve excellence in civic engagement cultivate the culture, norms, reflexes, and habits that will make civic engagement a central part of how the agency conducts its business.

Benchmarks

How do you know you're making progress toward reaching this standard?

- ☐ **Your agency applies internal measures to gauge how effectively staff are using civic engagement to collect public knowledge.** When staff and managers adopt the appropriate norms for engagement, they will be in the mode of seeking out public knowledge at every opportunity – through informal conversations, as well as scheduled civic engagement conversations. An agency that makes engagement a central part of the way it conducts business will be able to assess how often – and how effectively – this is occurring.
- ☐ **Your agency uses protocols for when, where, and how to engage the public.** A public agency with a culture of learning will have its own systems for engaging the public so that it is a regular part of the agency's business – not just a “necessary evil” when elected officials or other higher-ups mandate it.
- ☐ **Your agency implements processes for seeking out and understanding the range of voices to build public knowledge.** An agency that makes civic engagement a central part of how it does its business will have a system in place – and use that system – to make sure that all appropriate voices are heard during civic engagement so that real public knowledge is developed. This means more than seeking out the traditional kinds of “stakeholders” that are often considered to be the key audiences for civic engagement.

See Appendix B: Reference Guide for tools that will help you reach these benchmarks.



Pay-Offs

Why is it worth trying to achieve this standard?

- Your work will reflect the whole voice of the community instead of just a collection of certain neighborhoods or groups of people.
- The public will recognize that your agency is genuine in its pursuit of their knowledge – that you're not just engaging them to make them feel good.



Your agency will be acting with true **authenticity** when staff have the habits and reflexes that prove that civic engagement is a priority for the agency.

Reflection Questions

1. What are some things we are doing to work toward meeting this standard?

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2. Of the benchmarks listed, which ones are we meeting?

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3. How can we work on meeting the benchmarks we are deficient in?

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Appendix A

Standards At-A-Glance

We hope that completing this tool has helped you gain a better sense of where you are on the roadmap to meeting standards of excellence in civic engagement. The chart on the following page summarizes the four standards, as well as the benchmarks and pay-offs for each. We encourage you to refer to it before, during, and after any civic engagement process; display it prominently in your office; or share it with other staff.

The Harwood Institute's Standards of Excellence in Civic Engagement At-A-Glance

Standards Public agencies that achieve excellence in civic engagement:	Benchmarks How do we know we're making progress toward the standard?	Pay-Offs Why is it worth trying to meet this standard?
Are in the business of collecting public knowledge .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency adopts learning objectives for the knowledge staff are seeking. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency implements a strategy for collecting public knowledge on an ongoing basis. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency uses engagement processes that lead to gaining public knowledge. 	Your agency will hold real authority in the community when the public realizes that staff are after more than just input. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Real public knowledge will lead to better, more widely accepted decisions. ▪ There will be more public confidence in your agency's decision-making. ▪ Your agency will build a deep knowledge of the community that doesn't go away when staff leave.
Use public knowledge internally over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency implements processes and procedures for sharing public knowledge internally and in a timely way. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency makes certain that public knowledge is considered and applied in internal decision-making. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency uses established protocols for tracking how public knowledge has influenced the agency's decision-making. 	Your agency will be demonstrating authenticity , and staff will be exercising accountability among one another, if you use public knowledge internally over time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using public knowledge will help you make tough decisions that people will be able to live with, even if they don't agree. ▪ Civic engagement will drive your work and won't just be another activity staff has to check off of their "to-do" list.
Communicate back to the public what the agency has learned, and how staff and managers are using that knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency understands what public knowledge to share with citizens and shares it in a timely way. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency regularly shares with the public how their voice is impacting the agency's work. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency uses methods for measuring how well the public understands where their voice has impacted the agency's work. 	Your agency will be building stronger accountability with the community by communicating back what they learn from civic engagement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The public will become more involved in civic engagement when they see that it is making a difference. ▪ Support for engagement among elected officials and decision-makers will increase over time. ▪ People will be more likely to step forward and help solve public problems, instead of expecting the agency to do it all.
Develop the culture, norms, reflexes, and habits that will make civic engagement a central part of how the agency conducts its business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency applies internal measures to gauge how effectively staff are using civic engagement to collect public knowledge. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency uses protocols for when, where, and how to engage the public. <input type="checkbox"/> Your agency implements processes for seeking out and understanding the range of voices to build public knowledge. 	Your agency will be acting with true authenticity when staff have the habits and reflexes that prove that civic engagement is a priority for the agency. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your work will reflect the whole voice of the community instead of just a collection of certain neighborhoods or groups of people. ▪ The public will recognize that your agency is genuine in its pursuit of their knowledge – that you're not just engaging them to make them feel good.

Having worked through the standards of excellence and assessed your agency, you are undoubtedly thinking to yourself, “What can I do to achieve these standards?” Over the years, The Harwood Institute has developed a number of practical tools and frameworks that can help you in thinking through how to do just that. As public leaders, it is up to you to decide where you need to improve, how to improve, and to step forward and seek out the knowledge that will help you do that. Feel free to contact us for any of the materials presented below, and best of luck in your pursuit of excellence!

- The following guides will help you in designing and conducting regular civic engagement conversations to collect public knowledge. These can be found in The Harwood Institute’s publication ***Tapping Civic Life***.
 - Tips to Make Civic Conversations Work
 - Community Conversation Ground Rules
 - A Guide for Setting Up Community Conversations
 - Making Sense of What You Have Heard
 - Types of Community Leaders
 - The Layers of Civic Life
- The Harwood Institute’s Meaningful Chaos Factors will help you in understanding how people think about their communities, come to form their views on public concerns, and use words and phrases to describe their views. They can be found in The Harwood Institute’s framework, ***Meaningful Chaos: How People Form Relationships With Public Concerns***.
- ***Will Any Kind of Talk Do? Moving from Personal Concerns to Public Life***, will help you in better understanding how people in communities begin to make connections between what is going on in their own home or close-knit circle of family and friends and the larger community around them. Included in this Harwood framework is a profile of the six kinds of “everyday talkers,” which represent the different roles people play in everyday talk about their concerns.
- If you are struggling with how to make civic engagement a regular part of the way your agency does business, consider picking up ***Making It Real: How to Make Civic Engagement a Public Sensibility***. This tool provides seven concrete actions your agency can take that will help build the culture, norms, reflexes, and habits necessary to achieve excellence in civic engagement.
- For more information on the 3 A’s of Public Life, and how you can build them in your own agency, contact us for a copy of Richard Harwood’s ***series on the 3 A’s that appeared in Philanthropy News Digest***.

Imagine and Act for the Public Good



The **Harwood** Institute

Appendix D



Beyond the Usuals: Ideas To Encourage Broader Public Involvement In Your Community

Local officials and agencies strive to encourage broader participation in public meetings and other civic engagement efforts. Many times, even with the best of intentions and no matter what the approach, a relatively small group of community members actually takes part and makes their voices heard.

Given the challenges facing cities and towns around the state, residents are increasingly sought out and asked to join dialogues and deliberations relating to topics affecting the future of their communities. These discussions may relate to budget, land use, housing, the environment, transportation, growth, neighborhood services, or a host of other issues.

The importance of achieving representation from often underrepresented groups, including but not limited to ethnic, immigrant, low-income, youth, and disability communities, is self-evident if the legitimacy and effectiveness of civic engagement processes are to be realized.

From the sources identified below, the Institute for Local Government's Collaborative Governance Initiative has compiled a few suggestions for achieving better representation in public involvement and civic engagement efforts. We hope they're helpful. These include:

- **BUILD LONG TERM CAPACITY** - Before specific issues are on the table, help develop the knowledge and capacity of less involved communities to better understand government agencies and the continuum of opportunities for involvement.
- **GET HELP** - Identify and seek the help and advice of community-based and intermediary organizations, including grassroots leadership groups, religious organizations, and community-specific media, that can assist with general education about involvement, as well as provide two-way conduits for communication between government and community residents on specific issues and policies. Start by acknowledging these organizations' own interests and purposes, and seek to build ongoing alliances and relationships to encourage participation over time.
- **DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS** - Perceptions of the trust and commitment of government by often marginalized and less involved communities can be critical. Personal relationships developed by elected officials and agency staff with community and advocacy organizations will reap many rewards. Providing even minimum levels of assistance, perhaps logistical and meeting support, or training in meeting facilitation skills, can help groups reach out and prepare previously disengaged residents to become more involved.
- **COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY AND RESPECTFULLY** - Know your communities changing demographics, and invest in culturally and linguistically appropriate communications material and strategies. Recognize the importance of communicating with residents in their first language to ensure their maximum understanding of issues. Again, work with intermediary organizations that already serve and work with the communities you

wish to reach. Plan ahead for translation, interpretation, and access to public meetings. Transportation assistance and childcare (perhaps through respected intermediary organizations) can often be helpful.

- **BE FLEXIBLE** - At times, holding public meetings or other civic engagement processes in community settings known and accessible to the communities you wish to reach, perhaps co-sponsored by respected intermediary organizations, can help achieve your goals for broader participation. Explore what engagement tools and processes will best meet the needs and conditions of specific populations.
- **STAY IN TOUCH** - As appropriate, keep up to date lists of organizations and groups concerned about given issues and keep them informed of opportunities for involvement.
- **HAVE SPECIFIC GOALS** - Encourage attention and learning about these issues throughout government. Government departments should demonstrate not just general outreach and involvement goals, but also the specific communities or populations that they wish to more adequately involve and how they plan to do so.
- **FOLLOW UP** - Follow up after specific engagement efforts, and over time, to determine what worked and what could be improved, and where representation is trending weaker and stronger.
- **SAY THANK YOU** - Express appreciation for those that do become involved - at relevant meetings and hearings and by letter afterwards. As appropriate to the specific meeting or public involvement process, clarify how participants' input was considered and impacted the decision.
- **BUILD IT IN** - Finally, don't think of public involvement and civic engagement as a "stand alone" strategy. Explore the invitation and integration of community voice as a part of your overall strategy to support the goals and programs of local government.

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Appendix E

Hispanic Focus Group Findings and Recommendations

(To be added when completed)